



# THE LEADING EDGE

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*Newsletter of the Interior Columbia Basin Ecosystem Management Project-  
Evaluating and Implementing Ecosystem Management within the Interior Columbia Basin*

## Project sends Final EIS to the Public

### Proposed Decision Part of Final Environmental Impact Statement

The Interior Columbia Basin Ecosystem Management Project has completed its Final Environmental Impact Statement (EIS) for management of over 62 million acres of Bureau of Land Management and Forest Service administered lands in the state of Oregon, Idaho, Montana and Washington.

“The Final EIS responds to the comments we received on the Supplemental Draft EIS for the Project,

which was distributed for comment in March 2000,” according to Susan Giannettino and Geoff Middaugh, Project Manager and Deputy Project Manager, respectively, for the Project. “We have also made several clarifying changes in the EIS, as explained in the preface to that document. The proposed decision for the Project is the preferred alternative (Alternative S2) from the supplemental draft EIS, with refinements made in response to public comment and internal review.”

Copies of the Final EIS are being mailed to over 4,000 individuals and entities who have requested copies of the full document. The Final EIS incorporates the Supplemental Draft EIS by reference. This makes the Final EIS document considerably shorter than the 1,500 page Supplemental Draft EIS. In addition, this newsletter contains a summary of the Final EIS and it is being mailed to the Project’s mailing list of 14,000.

“Reaching a final EIS and proposed decision for this Project has involved collaboration among the Forest Service, Bureau of Land Management, National Marine Fisheries Service, Fish and Wildlife Service, Environmental Protection Agency, Tribes, other federal agencies, and State and local governments,” said Giannettino and Middaugh. “The public was instrumental in reviewing and commenting, making suggestions for improvement in the documents. We greatly appreciate your participation over the past six years.”

For those who do not receive the Final EIS but are interested in doing so, please contact the Project at (208) 334-1770 x120 to request a copy. The Final EIS and Supplemental Draft EIS are also published together on one CD and are available upon request. The documents are available on the Project’s web site at [www.icbemp.gov](http://www.icbemp.gov).

## Protests of Proposed Decision Outlined

If you have participated in the ICBEMP planning process and have an interest that is, or may be, adversely affected by approval of the proposed decision you may protest such approval.

The Bureau of Land Management and the Forest Service are both relying on this protest process to provide the opportunity for administrative review of the proposed decision. The Forest Service appeal process, familiar to some readers, will not be used for this project. New regulations allow the Forest Service to use the protest process. See 43 CFR 219.32, published in the *Federal Register* November 9, 2000.

A protest may raise only those issues which were submitted for the record during the planning process.

To protest the approval of the proposed decision for the Interior Columbia Basin Ecosystem Management Project put the protest in writing and mail it to the following address:

Director, Bureau of Land Management  
and Chief, Forest Service  
ICBEMP Protests  
PO Box 65480  
Washington, DC 20035

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## Protest Process

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The protest shall be filed within 30 days of the date the Environmental Protection Agency publishes the notice of receipt of the final environmental impact statement in the *Federal Register*. This publication is expected to be December 15, 2000.

The protest must contain the following information:

- The name, mailing address, telephone number and interest of the person filing the protest;
- A statement of the issue or issues being protested;
- A statement of the part or parts of the proposed decision being protested;
- A copy of all documents addressing the issue or issues that were

submitted during the planning process by the protesting party or an indication of the date the issue or issues were discussed for the record; and

- A concise statement explaining why the responsible officials' proposed decision is believed to be wrong.

The BLM Director and Forest Service Chief will promptly render a joint decision on the protest. The protest decision will be in writing and will set forth the reasons for the decision. The protest decision will be sent to the protesting party by certified mail, return receipt requested.

The joint decision of the Director and Chief on the protest shall be the final decision of the Department of the

Interior and the Department of Agriculture.

Reviewers who do not protest the proposed decision may not preserve their standing to litigate the final decision.

Once any protests are resolved, the responsible officials of the Forest Service and Bureau of Land Management will sign the Record of Decision for the ICBEMP.

For further information contact Gary Wyke at (208) 334-1770. BLM's Protest process is described in 43 CFR 1610.5-2.

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# Another Report to Congress

Wildfires of the summer of 2000 are the subject of a report the Interior Columbia Basin Ecosystem Management Project will be submitting to the U.S. Congress. The report is in response to requirements in the 2001 Interior and Related Agencies Appropriations bill.

The relevant portion of the legislation states, "None of the funds appropriated or otherwise made available by this Act may be used to issue a record of decision implementing the Interior Columbia Basin Ecosystem Management Project until the Secretaries of Agriculture and the Interior submit to Congress a report evaluating, for the area to be covered by the project, both the effect of the year

2000 wildfires and the President's initiative for managing the impact of wildfires on communities and the environment."

The Congressional direction instructs the Project to review the environmental analyses and documents regarding the Interior Columbia Basin Ecosystem Management Project. The intent is to bring the analysis and documentation into full conformance with the requirements of the National Environmental Policy Act requirements when new information or conditions arise, including procedures when there are significant new circumstances or information relevant to environmental

concerns and bearing on the proposed action or its impacts.

Congress expressed a concern that the analysis and documentation should include the summer 2000 wildfires and the President's initiative for managing the impact of wildfires on communities and the environment. Congress appropriated additional funds in the Interior Appropriations Bill to fund the proposal from the Administration for dealing with wildfires.

The report will be submitted in the near future to the House and Senate Committees on Appropriations.

# Summary Highlights of the Final EIS

## Purpose and Need

The Forest Service and Bureau of Land Management (BLM) propose to implement a coordinated, scientifically sound, broad-scale, ecosystem-based management strategy for lands they administer across parts of Idaho, Oregon, Montana, and Washington (approximately 63 million acres). The project area includes the interior Columbia River Basin east of the Cascades and portions of the upper Klamath Basin and the Great Basin in Oregon. Purposes of and need for such a strategy are to:

- Restore and maintain long-term ecosystem health and ecological integrity on lands administered by the Forest Service or the BLM;
- Support economic and/or social needs of people, cultures, and communities, through availability of sustainable and predictable levels of products and services from lands administered by the Forest Service or the BLM.

## Current Conditions

The ecological and social conditions and trends in the project area show a need for a new management strategy for public lands.

- The project area is sparsely populated and rural. Areas with high quality recreation and scenery are among those experiencing rapid population growth. Such growth is encroaching on previously undeveloped areas near Forest Service- and BLM-administered lands. This reduces wildlife habitat and increases costs for fire management to protect people and structures.
- Some communities rely on economic activity supported by timber harvest levels, processing of forest products, livestock grazing, mining, and recreation. Although forest products and forage production no longer solely dictate the economic prosperity of the region, they remain economically and culturally important in rural areas. Economic dependence on these industries is highest in geographically isolated communities that offer few alternative employment opportunities. Changing levels of goods and services can affect counties that benefit from federal sharing of receipts from sales of those goods and services from BLM- or Forest Service-administered lands.

- Proposed activities that change vegetation, roads, and watershed conditions may affect American Indians' relationship with, including access to, federal lands. Effects on culturally significant species such as anadromous fish and the habitat necessary to support healthy, sustainable, and harvestable aquatic and terrestrial species, in turn affect American Indian interests.
- In many areas, there are fewer large trees and old forests than there were historically. In dry and moist forests, large, scattered trees that are intolerant of shade have declined, while middle aged forests with smaller diameter trees that tolerate shade have increased. Within riparian woodland, there is more middle aged vegetation and less young and old vegetation, largely because of fire exclusion and the harvest of large trees. Western juniper has spread extensively into riparian shrublands; also large increases in non-native grasses and forbs have occurred, in part, from excessive livestock grazing pressure.
- Infestations of cheatgrass and other non-native plants are spreading rapidly throughout the project area. This has resulted in a smaller variety of plant species, reduced biodiversity, different species interactions, less available forage, and the system is less able to buffer against change.
- In dry grasslands and cool shrublands, sagebrush, juniper, ponderosa pine, lodgepole pine, douglas fir, and other woody species are more dense or are moving into areas where they previously did not exist. This has resulted in fewer grasses and forbs and lower biodiversity.
- Although air quality is good compared to other areas of the country, wildfires currently produce higher levels of smoke than they did historically because there are more available fuels for wildfires.
- Plants and animals are declining in part because of converting habitat to agricultural land and urban development, livestock grazing, timber harvest, introduction of non-native plants and animals, recreation, roads, fire exclusion, and mining. Fragmentation of vegetation has isolated some plants and animals and their habitats. This reduces their ability to disperse across the landscape, resulting in potential long-term loss of genetic interchange, especially in lower elevation forests, shrub steppe, and riparian areas.

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# Summary Highlights of the Final EIS (continued)

- On Forest Service- and BLM-administered lands, approximately 8 percent of stream miles are “water quality limited” (as defined in the Clean Water Act). Water diversions and impoundments, road construction, timber harvest, fire exclusion, and excessive livestock grazing have changed hydrologic conditions, stream flow, sedimentation, erosion, temperature, and the production and distribution of organic materials.
- There are fewer riparian areas and wetlands, primarily because of conversion to agriculture but also because of urbanization, transportation improvements, and modifications to the stream channels. On Forest Service- or BLM-administered lands, most riparian areas are either “not meeting objectives,” “not functioning,” or “functioning at risk.”
- Some native fishes are no longer found in large portions of their historical ranges. Many native non-game fishes are vulnerable because of their restricted distribution or fragile or unique habitats.
- Although several key salmonids are still broadly distributed (notably the cutthroat trout and redband trout), there have been declines in abundance, loss of life history patterns, local extinctions, and fragmentation and isolation in smaller blocks of high quality habitat. Wild chinook salmon and steelhead are near extinction in much of their remaining habitat.

## Management Alternatives

**Alternative S1**, also called the “no-action” alternative because it continues management practices already in place, represents the 62 land use plans (as amended by the interim direction in PACFISH, INFISH, and the Eastside Screens) currently in use within the project area. Each plan is specific to a Forest Service- or BLM-administered area and each was developed using different management definitions and policies. Under Alternative S1, the Biological Opinions for PACFISH and INFISH and the standards for rangeland health and guidelines for livestock grazing management (Healthy Rangelands) on BLM-administered lands would continue. Alternative S1 does not include a comprehensive restoration strategy, aquatic or terrestrial habitats are not prioritized between administrative areas (for example between the Vale BLM District and the Winema National Forest), and various ecosystem components (such as timber, rangeland, and wildlife species) are generally managed as individual resource issues, rather than as one integrated system.

**Alternative S2** was identified as the **preferred alternative** in the Supplemental Draft EIS. It was modified in response to public comment and internal (Forest Service and BLM) review, and is referred to as the **proposed decision** in the Final EIS. This alternative focuses on restoring and maintaining ecosystems across the project area and providing for the social and economic needs of people, while minimizing short-term risks to natural resources from human and natural disturbances. It does this by providing four key elements:

1. Integrated management direction that addresses the dynamics of change across entire landscapes and highlights possible broad-scale causal relationships among ecosystem components including vegetation dynamics, terrestrial species habitats, aquatic species and riparian and hydrological processes, socioeconomic systems and tribal concerns.
2. A process that uses these broad-scale conditions to set context and focus issues at the individual Forest Service/BLM administrative unit level (step down).
3. An adaptive management strategy that allows modification of management direction as new information and new experimental data is collected and understood.
4. Monitoring and evaluation to ensure management activities are achieving desired results.

Alternative S2 encourages the Forest Service and BLM to support local communities and tribal governments, particularly those that are isolated and economically specialized, as they develop methods to support their long-range goals of economic development and diversification. It also addresses federal trust responsibilities and tribal rights and interests as fully as possible.

Alternative S2 identifies subwatersheds (about 10,000 acres) with important fish populations (A1 and A2 subwatersheds), watersheds (about 50,000 acres) with key terrestrial species habitats (T watersheds), and subbasins (about 1 million acres) where restoration activities should occur first (from a broad-scale perspective). These areas were identified so that management resources (assuming realistic agency budgets) could be focused where the natural resources would most likely benefit from protective or restorative actions. In the short term, the intent is to conserve the scarce habitats in A1, A2, and T areas; and in the long term, the intent is to increase the amount and connectivity of these habitats. The short- and long-term

# Summary Highlights of the Final EIS (continued)

intent of the high priority restoration subbasins is to restore those ecosystems that are not functioning properly, concentrating first on the areas with both the opportunity and the need.

**Alternative S3** provides the same four key elements as does Alternative S2. It also encourages the Forest Service and BLM to support local communities and tribal governments, particularly those that are isolated and economically specialized; and it addresses federal trust responsibilities and tribal rights and interests.

Alternative S3 includes *fewer* subwatersheds with important fish populations (A1 and A2 subwatersheds), the *same* number of watersheds with key terrestrial species habitats (T watersheds), and *more* high restoration priority subbasins compared to Alternative S2. Alternative S3 places less emphasis on conducting step-down analysis (Subbasin Review and Ecosystem Analysis at the Watershed Scale) before conducting management actions. Under Alternative S3, more short-term risk would be allowed in an attempt to minimize long-term risk to resources from natural disturbances, such as unnaturally severe wildfires.

## Environmental Consequences

Livestock grazing on BLM- and Forest Service-administered lands and the number of related jobs would decline the most under Alternative S2, followed by Alternative S3. Conversely, increases in timber volume, forest and rangeland restoration activities, and related jobs would be slightly higher under Alternative S2 than Alternative S3. Livestock grazing, timber volumes, restoration, and jobs related to federal land outputs would remain near current levels under Alternative S1. No broad-scale changes were predicted for levels of recreation and related jobs. Economic and social effects would be small at the broad scale (across the project area). However, at finer scales, for example at the community level, adverse economic and social effects would likely be more significant—especially in geographically isolated communities that are dependant on goods and services from federal lands. Overall, Alternative S2 would have the greatest benefits for tribal rights and interests, followed by Alternative S3 and Alternative S1, respectively.

Overall, Alternative S2 would result in better conditions for wildlife on BLM- and Forest Service-administered lands than Alternatives S3 and S1, respectively. Specifically, old

forests, riparian areas, and certain other scarce habitats would improve; therefore, wildlife that use those habitats would benefit the most under Alternative S2. Conditions for rangeland species would be stable or declining because of a lack of available resources (money).

Alternative S2 would maintain or restore hydrologic functions and watershed processes slightly better than Alternative S3. Hydrologic function and watershed processes would gradually decline in the long term under Alternative S1. The largest improvement in aquatic habitat on Forest Service- and BLM-administered lands would occur under Alternative S2, then Alternative S1 and Alternative S3, respectively. Riparian ecological processes would remain stable or improve under Alternative S2; remain stable under Alternative S1, and would be more uncertain under Alternative S3.

Alternative S1 would have the greatest adverse effects on air quality because of smoke from large wildfires. Prescribed fires under Alternatives S2 and S3 would generate more frequent but lesser amounts of smoke and lower total air quality impact than Alternative S1.

## Proposed Decision

The Forest Service and BLM decision makers for the Interior Columbia Basin Ecosystem Management Project identified Alternative S2 as the preferred alternative from among the seven alternatives analyzed in the Eastside and Upper Columbia River Basin Draft EISs and the three alternatives analyzed in the Supplemental Draft EIS. They felt that it would provide the strongest and best strategy for restoring the health of forestlands, rangelands, and aquatic-riparian ecosystems; recovering wildlife, fish, and plants; avoiding future listings of fish and wildlife; providing predictable levels of goods and services from Forest Service- and BLM-administered lands; and addressing American Indian rights and interests. Public comments on the Supplemental Draft EIS were considered and incorporated for the Final EIS. Alternative S2, as refined, is the proposed decision.

This newsletter provides brief highlights of the Final EIS for the Interior Columbia Basin Ecosystem Management Project. The Final EIS and Proposed Decision are available in a printed version, on CD, or can be downloaded from our website, [www.icbemp.gov](http://www.icbemp.gov). If you would like a printed or CD copy, please contact the Project office in Boise, Idaho (208-334-1770). The CD copy also includes the Supplemental Draft EIS.

The Final EIS incorporates the Supplemental Draft EIS by reference. If you want a copy of the Supplemental Draft EIS to refer to when reading the Final EIS, printed copies of the Supplemental Draft EIS are available upon request.

The proposed decision (Alternative S2 as modified by public comments and internal review) accompanies the Final EIS as a separate document. It was identified as the preferred alternative and proposed decision because it best meets the Project's purpose and need.

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